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ABSTRACT

The intent of the study discussed in this paper was to document and describe discrepancies between the content of university course work and practices observed in the schools and to examine the thinking and decision making of preservice teachers faced with dilemmas created by the discrepancies. Two fifth year programs that integrated course work with clinical experiences provided the context. Subjects (N=71) were 41 secondary (29 from Portland State University, 12 from Pacific University and 20 elementary level students placed in a variety of field experiences. Data were collected through journals, class discussions, and interviews with cooperating teachers, school administrators, and university faculty. The data were then categorized into areas of most frequent discrepancy: planning, assessment, classroom management, practice, grouping strategies, and teaching models. Findings indicated that students were willing to abandon what they had learned at the university in order to align themselves with the school. Some students reported using instructional practices selectively, based on who was observing the lesson. Discrepancies between university course work and practice in the schools offers an opportunity for collaboration between the university and the school district thus enabling students to work through their dilemmas with the support of a collaborative team. (LL)

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DILEMMAS CAUSED BY DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN WHAT THEY LEARN AND WHAT THEY SEE: THINKING AND DECISION-MAKING OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher education research reveals that preservice teachers may ignore or devalue university course work and requirements (Applegate, 1986) when placed in field situations where discrepancies exist between the teachings from the university and the experience in the public schools. Evertson (1990) describes the problem as, "the discontinuity between the content and skills to be learned and the feedback and reinforcement for learning." When preservice teachers apply the ideas or work on assignments from courses in classrooms, the "real world" does not always communicate that those ideas or assignments are important or relevant.

Preservice teachers may attempt to reduce the conflict caused by the dissonance between the university and the school by negating feedback offered by university supervisors as irrelevant. Lipton and Lesser (1978) report that the university supervisor's influence on student teachers and learning to teach is minimal. Preservice teachers' decisions often focus on maintaining classroom control (Carter and Doyle, 1987), even when the practice may be in conflict with ideals previously expressed in journals and university course work.

This study of discrepancies emerged from the continuing concern that field experiences may negate learning from university course work (Haberman, 1983), may further a utilitarian perspective to teaching (Zeichner, 1980), and may promote a stabilization of the "status quo" of teaching (Goodlad, 1991). The intent of this study was to document discrepancies between the content of university course work and practices observed in field experiences and to examine and describe the cognition and decision-making of preservice teachers as they are faced with the dilemmas of "sorting out the truths and realities" (Tabachnick, 1980).

METHODOLOGY

The study intent was to document and describe the discrepancies observed between the content of university course work and practices in the schools and to study the thinking and decision-making of preservice teachers faced with dilemmas created by the discrepancies. The methodology of this study responded to gaps in the research knowledge base in teacher education

by providing a descriptive picture of the discrepancies faced by preservice teachers while "learning to teach."

Sample

Two teacher education programs characterized by yearlong programs that integrated course work with clinical experiences provided the context for the collection of discrepancies between what students learned in courses and what students observed in classrooms. Both programs are fifth year programs which require a bachelor's degree prior to admission. The majority of the students have been involved in various careers prior to entering teacher education.

One program is located at Portland State University, which is a large, urban university within the state system of higher education in Oregon. Students enrolled in this program are generally older, ranging in age from late 20's to 50. The other university, Pacific University, is a small, private school located 30 miles from Portland in a rural setting. Students in the Fifth-Year/MAT program range in age from 21-50 years. A total of 29 secondary and 30 elementary level students from Portland State University and 12 secondary level students from Pacific University participated in the study. The 71 students were placed in a variety of field experiences, ranging from inner-city schools to rural settings.

Data Collection

Preservice teachers enrolled in these teacher education programs provided data through journal writing, assignments, and class discussions. Triangulation was accomplished by examining a variety of data sources for consistency. Interviews of cooperating teachers, school administrators, and university faculty provided additional perceptions and confirmations of discrepancies.

Data were collected over a 12 month period and then analyzed and sorted into categories of most frequently recorded discrepancies. Further analysis probed for thinking, perceptions, and decision-making occurring when the discrepancies created dilemmas for the preservice teachers.

RESULTS

Six major categories of discrepancies emerged from the journals, discussions and assignments throughout the yearlong program. These categories were planning, assessment, classroom management, practice, grouping strategies, and teaching models.

The first category, planning, presented significant discrepancies and a major dilemma for preservice teachers early in their program. When learning about planning, students were encouraged to develop objectives that would guide lesson activities and assessment, and to determine clear organization for teaching and learning experiences. Research on teacher planning predicted students' observations about the lack of written objectives. Experienced teachers described "knowing where you are headed" as one of the three most important variables in the planning process (Borko & Niles, 1987). Morine-Dershimer (1979) described lesson images or mental plans that are constructed by the experienced teacher and are seldom reflected in written plans.

In the study, students were asked to bring in a sample of a lesson plan from their cooperating teacher. It was an appropriate assignment for study of the planning process in teaching. Only two of the elementary preservice teachers and one of the secondary level students were able to bring a sample lesson plan. The consequence was a familiar question to those who work with preservice teachers, "Why are we learning to write lesson plans when teachers don't write or use lesson plans?"

When teachers in Clark and Yinger's 1979 study were asked to list and describe the most important types of planning conducted during the school year, unit planning was identified as the most important type of plan. Only one sample of a unit plan was available to the total group of preservice teachers.

Preservice teachers in the study described the planning of their cooperating teachers as focusing on content or activities centered around the schedule book. Lists of activities or page numbers for subject areas were the typical notation that could be construed as planning. Preservice teachers expressed concern for their ability to plan with such limited outlines for activities. They noted minimal direction for teaching and loose connection between assessment and teaching and learning. The students heard "lack of time for planning" frequently described by classroom teachers. They often heard the suggestion that objectives and assessment are implied in activities or specified in textbooks or teacher manuals. However, they also observed many lessons that clearly lacked direction and indication of learning. After writing and teaching lessons of their own, the preservice teachers described a two-fold dilemma: One of concern about time to do such detailed planning; and one of concern about the quality of their teaching without such planning.

Borko and Niles (1987) suggest that preservice teachers will benefit from an understanding of how experienced teachers plan, and why these plans often look different from the lesson planning taught at the university. Conversations about purposes of planning and varied formats of planning at different levels of experience may provide insights to reconcile the discrepancies for both preservice and experienced teachers.

Found within the second category of teaching practice, assessment, two major discrepancies appear often for preservice teachers. The first concerns the purpose of assessment and the second concerns the form(s) of assessment. Preservice teachers were taught to consider assessment for the purposes of diagnosing student need, ability, and interest, and for prescribing appropriate learning activities. They often reported the use of pretests and other strategies which appear to be diagnostic. Their confusion results from scenarios such as the following:

> Fifth grade students take a pretest on the weekly spelling words each Monday. A number of students score 100% on the pretest, yet continue to proceed through the identical daily spelling lessons as the rest of the class. It appears that pretests and diagnosis are irrelevant, as students complete the same activities regardless of their prior knowledge. This pattern is repeated throughout the school year with the implication that pretest scores have no influence on teaching practice.

Another purpose of assessment taught in university courses was the concept of formative and ongoing assessment. Ongoing assessment may provide information about student comprehension, need to re-teach, or appropriateness of the level of difficulty or pacing of lessons. Most of the ongoing assessment observed by preservice teachers yielded grades to be recorded in a book, with no further use evident to the observer. Again, mental planning may be occurring, but little evidence of such was observed by the preservice teachers. They reported that even when assessment indicated confusion or a lack of understanding on the student's part, the week proceeded as "planned" in the schedule book, according to predetermined page numbers within the texts or work sheets.

Recent recommendations (Stiggens, 1988) are calling for teacher educators to provide comprehensive preparation in assessment practices, including the development and use of multiple forms of assessment. Preservice teachers learn about interviews, observations and recording forms, portfolio development, varied "pencil and paper" tests, checklists, self-assessments, and work samples. In this study, preservice teachers brought in assessment

samples gathered and observed over a three month period. Most of the samples were either "pencil and paper" tests or questions asked during class. A familiar question was posed, "Why are you encouraging us to use all those creative measures when we probably won't get to do anything with them?" The dilemma became one of choosing between practice that supports student learning and variations in curriculum, and practice that appears efficient and widely accepted.

Within the third category, classroom management, course work focused on environments, expectations for behavior, routines, consequences for inappropriate behavior, communication, and relationship building. Preservice teachers cognitively adopt the most humanistic approaches to classroom management from models like Teacher Effectiveness Training, Glasser's Classrooms Without Failure, and Dreikurs' "logical consequences". Yet, the most commonly observed model in their field experiences was "Assertive Discipline" in a range of formats. In addition, students described strategies and responses to student behavior that denied concern for individual students.

The journals and observations of the preservice teachers reported "put downs", inconsistent responses, belittling, negative expectations, consequences unrelated to student behavior, lack of routines, unclear directions, and developmentally inappropriate behavior limits. Their journals reveal the overwhelming problems influencing classroom life, and the lack of resources which frame teachers' abilities to cope or remedy situations. Their writing reflected an appreciation of the magnitude of classroom management, but also expressed discouragement and concern with what was observed under the circumstances.

The not so subtle message regarding management and discipline during clinical experiences was "keeping children well behaved and quiet." Preservice teachers were observed selecting lessons on the basis of the amount of noise potential, sensing that their teaching would be judged on their ability to "control" the class. Arnstine (1990) describes a situation similar to those reported by our students:

> In her classes on campus, the prospective teacher may talk about the benefits of active learning, of the cultivation of interest and excitement in the subject, or of the human need for socialization and interaction. While the conversations on campus may make her uneasy or angry or guilty about school practices, she finds that in her practice teaching she is expected to deliver a predetermined curriculum in a very short time while maintaining a quiet and orderly classroom. (p. 240)

Arnstine warns that under such conditions, "natural inclinations to be rational and caring give way to teaching methods that are authoritative and promote competition" (p. 240). The dilemma was often resolved by preservice teacher's decisions to maintain the "status quo".

The fourth category, practice, causes intense worry and confusion in preservice teachers. In instructional theory, practice follows the teaching of skills. Preservice teachers learned that substantive teaching develops the understandings required by a practice activity, or that the skill needed for the practice activity has been developed prior to individual practice. Most reports from classrooms described instead, a brief direction-giving episode followed by a long period of practice activities. Preservice teachers struggled with interpreting this pattern, and reported observing students who were frustrated and confused with the practice activity. The research on seatwork from students' perspectives describes student understanding of the practice activity as "something to get done" (Anderson, 1985). This perception from students does not seem surprising when viewed within preservice teachers' observations.

In university classes, preservice teachers were encouraged to provide variety in practice assignments. Elementary students reported endless seatwork worksheets that repeated the same practice procedures throughout the year. Secondary students describe the most common and often assigned homework task, "Read the chapter and answer the questions at the end." Preservice teachers agreed with the importance of variety and purpose of practice but were discouraged by the lack of models. Their dilemma was one of how to learn to provide variety in practice without first observing a range of practice activities.

The fifth category, grouping strategies, presented a major discrepancy related to the use and benefits of homogeneous grouping. Preservice teachers generally reported homogeneous groups in the elementary schools, with reading and math often taught in a traditional "three group" approach. They also raised questions about the continuation of such approaches in view of research indicating negative benefits for students. Those same questions were later replaced by management concerns when preservice teachers began teaching classes. The dilemma became one of how to teach an entire class of students without implementing traditional ability groups.

At the secondary level, preservice teachers observed tracking, with the choice of curriculum driving the level at which students were tracked. Their impressions described the practice as one to be accepted and followed without question, as this was often a school-wide policy.

Preservice teachers expressed a great interest in cooperative learning approaches, and were eager to see it in practice. Good and Brophy (1991) suggest that teachers implement cooperative learning activities at least as, "alternatives to traditional independent seatwork." Preservice teachers did report seeing many instances of cooperative learning, with variations from use as random activities to use as the core of instruction. Questions and concerns were raised about grading practices associated with cooperative learning projects and about classroom management within the loosely structured environment."

The final category of discrepancies was instructional variation. It was with great enthusiasm that preservice teachers participated in a month-long demonstration of teaching models. Sessions after each model demonstration were spirited, questions and discussion were intense, and interest was high. At the completion, the assignment was to observe several of these models or components of them in the field placements, and record these observations in narrative format. Many of the preservice teachers had completed six weeks of classroom placements which included observations, interviews, assisting teachers, and tutoring students. There was immediate concern about this assignment, "What if I don't see any of the models?" "How could I find teachers that use any of these models?" "I'm not sure that the teachers I observe know about these models." The dialogue ended with decreased enthusiasm and a sense of discredit for the models. Following class, one of the secondary preservice teachers wrote that he felt fortunate because, "my teacher uses some of these teaching models, she is so good and students love her class."

When the assignments were turned in, only three preservice teachers reported that they had seen any of the models presented in the course. One student described three extremely interesting lessons, and when asked about them, spoke excitedly about the wonderful teaching she observed. Another student wrote at length about teaching he observed. "All I ever saw was the daily lecture, followed by students working at their places on assignments...day after day...it was pretty boring for me and it must have been for the students. I didn't even see parts of the models, not even an advanced organizer." This narrative was discouraging in itself, but concern about the discrepancies was heightened by a later journal entry. He wrote, "I really think that my time in the schools was more valuable than the time I spent in university classes. It was more practical, challenging, and fun."

Several themes characterized the thinking and decision-making in response to the dilemmas created by the discrepancies. The first theme centered on the personal aspect of teaching. Preservice teachers expressed concerns about maintaining personal beliefs and ideals

throughout the "learning to teach" process. Their decisions often involved shifts to the "status quo" existing in schools. An example of these changes was illustrated in the prior discussion of classroom management discrepancies. Students expressed a strong interest in humanistic approaches to classroom management, yet adopted more authoritarian approaches during student teaching. The shift made by preservice teachers is a significant one, especially when viewed in the context of research showing that 69% of beginning teachers shift to practices that are in contrast to their beliefs (Hatch & Freeman, 1988).

The second theme focused on pragmatic and survival issues, such as, "Should I use this instructional technique if it is not accepted practice at my school?" While students were enthusiastic about trying out innovative teaching strategies and models, when they were being observed they practiced models that were common at their school site. Again, the ideas presented at the university were dropped and replaced with accepted practice. The decisions again were characterized by shifts to the "status quo."

Finally, the third theme was one of exploration of the profession and a global reflection on teaching. Preservice teachers wondered, "What is the reality of teaching?" The age-old debate over the university "ideals" versus the traditional (and accepted) practice of the schools emerged as a dichotomy. Students were not able to connect the two loci of learning, and tended to separate the information instead of attempting to reflect on practices using knowledge gained from both settings.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Numerous decisions were made in response to the discrepancies. For example, students were willing to abandon what they had learned at the university in order to align themselves with the school. Some students reported using instructional practices selectively, based on who was observing the lesson. Finesse was deemed necessary to appease both university and school faculty. Students felt they were "in the middle" and needed to base instructional decisions on contextual rationale. Teaching decisions were influenced by field experiences, peers, personal experience in schools, and the relationship with the cooperating teacher. There was a significant lack of mention of university coursework. Students also reported self-perceptions of over-confidence, anguish, disappointment, cynicism, confusion, and turmoil when faced with the discrepancies presented throughout their program.

An understanding of the dilemmas faced by preservice teachers is critical to the development of outstanding teacher education programs. The discrepancies between university course work and

practices in the schools offers an inquiry focus for collaboration between universities and school districts. Opportunities must be provided for students to work through dilemmas with the support of a collaborative team composed of university and school faculty. Faculty must listen to the voices of preservice teachers as they develop pedagogical understanding. These voices must be considered in future program development.

One of the components of teacher education left relatively untouched by the reform movement is the role of accomplished classroom teachers in the development and implementation of preservice programs. University interactions with classroom teachers have traditionally focused on supervisory matters. Expanding the dialogue to include these discrepancies and how best to respond to the resultant dilemmas could alter the current "we and they" thinking prevalent in many teacher education programs and engage university and school district faculty in a common goal of preparing outstanding teachers.

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